

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:27 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Queen Elizabeth II

and Prime Minister Tony Blair of the United Kingdom.

The President's Radio Address *November 22, 2003*

Good morning. This week Congress made significant progress toward improving the lives of America's senior citizens. The House of Representatives passed legislation that would bring prescription drug coverage to Medicare and lead to health care choices for our seniors. This legislation, if also passed by the Senate, would represent the greatest improvement in senior health care since Medicare was enacted in 1965.

When these reforms take full effect, our seniors would see real savings in their health care costs. Within 6 months, seniors would be eligible for a drug discount card that would save them between 10 and 25 percent off the retail price of most drugs. When the full drug benefit arrives in 2006, all seniors become eligible for drug coverage for a monthly premium of about \$35. For most seniors without coverage today, the Medicare drug plan would cut their annual drug bills roughly in half.

Seniors with the highest drug bills would save the most, and seniors with the greatest need would get the most help. Low-income seniors would pay a reduced premium or no premium at all for the new drug coverage. And low-income seniors would also have lower copayments for their medicines.

Here is an example of how this benefit would work. A senior taking drugs to treat arthritis, high cholesterol, and migraines has a typical drug bill of about \$250 a month, or \$3,000 a year. With this legislation, this retiree would save \$1,680 after paying her insurance premiums—more than half her current drug costs.

Under the new reforms, seniors would have more choices of health care coverage.

Should seniors want to stay in traditional Medicare and receive a prescription drug benefit, they would be able to do so. Some seniors may want expanded coverage for extended hospital stays or protection against high out-of-pocket medical expenses, or they may want the coverage that comes with managed care plans. Under the new law, all those choices would be available. With choice, seniors would have more control over their health care options, and health plans would compete for the business with better coverage.

We're on the verge of success because of bipartisan leadership and because of the support of many advocates for seniors, including the AARP. Throughout many months of discussion and debate, we've remained focused on the clear objective: to modernize and strengthen the Medicare system. And by working together, we're close to meeting that goal.

In the nearly 40 years since Medicare was launched, this is the most significant opportunity for any Congress to improve health coverage for our seniors. Now we're down to the final stages. This Congress will decide whether or not seniors will have prescription drug coverage under Medicare, and this Congress will decide whether America's seniors will have better health care choices.

I urge all Members of Congress to remember what is at stake and to remember the promise we have made to America's seniors. The quality of their health care and the future strength of Medicare depends on the passage of this much needed legislation.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 4:35 p.m. on November 21 for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on November 22. The transcript was made

available by the Office of the Press Secretary on November 21 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Statement on House of Representatives Action on Medicare Reform Legislation *November 22, 2003*

The House's historic passage of the bipartisan Medicare bill brings seniors one step closer to a modern Medicare system, one that includes prescription drugs and choices for seniors. I applaud the House for meeting our obligations to America's seniors. Now it is time for the Senate to

act. I urge the Senate to pass this good piece of legislation so that I can sign it into law.

NOTE: The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language version of this statement.

Statement on Signing the Military Construction Appropriations Act, 2004 *November 22, 2003*

Today, I have signed into law H.R. 2559, the "Military Construction Appropriations Act, 2004." The Act appropriates funds for construction to support the operations of the U.S. Armed Forces and for military family housing.

Sections 107, 110, and 113 provide for notice to the Congress of relocation of activities between military installations, initiation of a new installation abroad, or U.S. military exercises involving \$100,000 in construction costs. The Supreme Court of the United States has stated that the President's authority to classify and control access to information bearing on national security flows from the Constitution and does not depend upon a legislative grant of authority. Although notice can be provided in most situations as a matter of comity, situations may arise, especially in wartime, in which the President must act promptly under his constitutional grants of executive

power and authority as Commander in Chief while protecting sensitive national security information. The executive branch shall construe these sections in a manner consistent with the constitutional authority of the President.

Section 119 provides for the Secretary of Defense to submit a report to Congress with details of proposed actions to encourage certain cooperating nations to assume a greater share of the common defense burden. Section 128 of the Act establishes a commission of eight congressionally-designated members to study the U.S. military facility structure overseas and provides for commission access to information. The executive branch shall construe sections 119 and 128 in a manner consistent with the President's constitutional authority to withhold information the disclosure of which could impair foreign relations, the national security, the deliberative processes of the